

VZCZCXRO6834  
OO RUEHROV  
DE RUEHTV #2050/01 2591033  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 161033Z SEP 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3467  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 002050

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [OREP](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: IDF SOUTHERN COMMAND AND SHIN BET BRIEFINGS ON  
GAZA FOR CODEL GILLIBRAND

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis G. Moreno for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. CODEL Gillibrand received separate briefings on the Gaza security situation by the IDF Southern Command and the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) September 2 and 3. Major General Yoav Gallant told the CODEL that the Southern Command's role is to manage the threat from Gaza, but admitted that the IDF cannot solve it. Gallant said Israel will not allow Hamas to achieve a position of mutual deterrence with Israel. He noted that Israel has set a series of goals for Gaza that cannot all be achieved, so the political leadership needs to make decisions. In a separate briefing September 3, a senior Israel General Security Service (Shin Bet) official discussed the current situation in Gaza. He said that Hamas remains in firm control of Gaza, despite increased dissatisfaction among the people. Hamas, he explained, has learned from its mistakes during Israel's Operation Cast Lead last December, and rebuilt its military capability. He asserted that Operation Cast Lead succeeded in deterring Hamas, but he warned the next operation in Gaza would be far more difficult. He also said that Hamas expects it will be given international legitimacy soon, including recognition from the United States, without having to pay any price. As a consequence, Hamas is unwilling to compromise with Fatah or change its current behavior in any way. Although there are no threats to Hamas' rule in Gaza, he pointed out that the recent emergence of Al-Qaeda inspired, but not affiliated, groups will continue to harass the regime. In response to a question from Senator Gillibrand, he said that Hamas has tried to employ cyber-terror against Israel, but that their capabilities remain rudimentary. END SUMMARY.

-----  
The View from Southern Command  
-----

¶2. (S) MG Gallant explained that Gaza will be troublesome for years to come. The Southern Command's role is to manage the immediate threat but it cannot solve the problem. Sixty percent of Gaza's population is under the age of twenty and the average income is one-twenty-fifth of the average income of Israelis in Sderot (a relatively poor Israeli town). Gaza has no natural resources except for fishing. Those factors would be reason enough for Gazans to fight, even without religious extremism. Gallant commented that one day's worth of Saudi oil production was equivalent to the annual income of Gaza.

¶3. (S) Gallant said Hamas has three goals: to become the leaders of the Palestinian people, to establish an Islamist Palestinian state, first in Gaza, and to establish a balance of power with Israel based on mutual deterrence. Israel cannot allow such a balance of power, but Gallant noted that it had taken Israel a long time to do anything serious to prevent it. Hamas sought to balance Israel's military superiority by hiding behind the civilian population, building its headquarters next to schools, hospitals and UN

facilities. Gallant noted that Hamas had misevaluated Israel's willingness to use force. During Operation Cast Lead, the IDF had operated in Gaza with limited power and without holding territory. They also decided not to enter the main urban areas on the ground. As a result, an operation that could have been accomplished in three days took three weeks. Gallant said he was pleased with the results, given the limited goals of the operation.

14. (S) Asked what should be done with Gaza in the long run, Gallant admitted that he expects Gaza to be unstable for a long time. He noted that Israel wants to maintain the ceasefire with Hamas in the short term, not to allow Hamas to become stronger in the medium term, and for Israel not to reassume responsibility for Gaza in the long term. Israel, he said, cannot achieve all three goals, noting for example that a lasting ceasefire is likely to lead to a stronger Hamas. The Israeli political leadership must decide what it wants to achieve in Gaza.

-----  
Hamas in control, but not as comfortable  
-----

15. (S) During their meeting on September 3, a senior Shin Bet official (NOTE: Shin Bet officials below the director prefer not to be identified by name. END NOTE.) told Senator Gillibrand that Hamas remains in firm control of Gaza, but there is increasing public dissatisfaction with the regime. While this is not a threat to their control, it forces Hamas to proceed more carefully with their agenda. The immediate Hamas goals, he said, were to get the crossings opened and to

TEL AVIV 00002050 002 OF 003

end Fatah arrests of Hamas operatives in the West Bank. Israel will not open the crossings, he added, until Gilad Shalit returns.

16. (S) Although the success of Operation Cast Lead has dramatically lowered the level of rocket and mortar fire from Gaza, the official explained that Hamas still maintains a serious military capability. They have employed lessons-learned from the operation, he said, replaced over half their military leadership, and have rearmed to pre-Cast Lead levels. Hamas is also actively trying to develop new capabilities, such as obtaining rockets from Iran that can reach Tel Aviv and increasing their internal arms production capability so they rely less upon smuggling. As a result, he warned that the next open conflict with Hamas will be more difficult.

17. (S) The official added that Egypt has done more to stop smuggling, but it still is not enough. For example, he said that Shin Bet and the Mossad gave Egyptian intelligence the names of the top 300 smugglers in the Sinai, but Egypt did not act against any of them. This indicates issues that Egypt's request for U.S. equipment and expertise will not fix the problem. He then showed a video of a van full of weapons being unloaded from a tunnel and transferred to a house in Rafah. He noted that the IDF was able to get this video, but decided not to attack the van for fear of inflaming the situation, adding "Does this mean we are also deterred?"

-----  
Hamas doesn't see the need to change  
-----

18. (S) Hamas firmly believes it will get the legitimacy it craves very soon, the official asserted, and thinks it can do so without paying any price. This includes recognition by the United States. Therefore, Hamas has no intention of changing their actions or further reducing their commitment to violence. It also means that there is no chance of Hamas reconciliation with Fatah, the official explained. Hamas is not changing its demands. Abu Mazen also can't make concessions because of the U.S. position, and because if he

releases the Hamas detainees in the West Bank, a key Hamas demand, these operatives would be a threat to Abu Mazen's government.

¶9. (S) Senator Gillibrand then asked if Hamas employs the internet for cyber-terror. The official replied that Hamas mainly uses the internet for propaganda and to foster communications between Gaza, the West Bank, and their offices in Syria. However, he cautioned that Hamas has attempted cyber-attacks against Israel, but their abilities are still rudimentary. He expressed some long-term concerns about cyber-security, largely because free market technologies advance more rapidly than government-sponsored ones, and because there are large legislative gaps concerning means to counter internet-based terror. For example, he said there is no law against downloading plans for a bomb. He emphasized that more international cooperation on cyber-security is needed.

-----  
Concerns about the Global Jihad  
-----

¶10. (S) The latest development in Gaza, the official explained, was the emergence of Al-Qaeda inspired groups in Gaza within the last year. While not yet formally connected to Al-Qaeda, they have the same ideals, goals, and methods. These groups oppose the rule of Hamas, which they see as not engaging in enough terror against Israel and not enforcing strict Islamic rule. These loosely-connected groups are largely made up of former Hamas extremists who have become disaffected with the movement.

¶11. (S) There are a few foreign fighters in Gaza, the official said, veterans of Iraq, Afghanistan, etc., but their numbers are not yet significant. Shin Bet believes the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq will cause many foreign fighters to try to shift to the West Bank and Gaza, but he said Israel is prepared to stop them.

¶12. (S) These groups have caused serious concern for Hamas because they have been behind planned attacks on President Carter, and they planned the horse-back attack on Nahal Oz last June. The attack surprised Hamas, which was very worried that another group could plan such a complicated terror operation without them knowing anything about it. He added that the attack also took Shin Bet by surprise and was only thwarted due to the excellent response of the IDF troops. Shin Bet, he said, has been focusing on penetrating

TEL AVIV 00002050 003.2 OF 003

Hamas and has very little intelligence on these new groups.

¶13. (S) Hamas concerns over the activities of these global Jihadists led to violent crackdowns against them last month, around Rafah. However, the official noted there have been 10 bombings of Hamas facilities in the previous week, although no one has been killed. While no group has claimed responsibility, it is likely the same people. The Shin Bet official said that these groups are not a serious threat to Hamas rule in Gaza, but will continue to harass them.

¶14. (U) CODEL Gillibrand has cleared this cable.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>  
\*\*\*\*\*  
CUNNINGHAM